"Crispino" Frolics at Two Houses

The Old Opera Buffa, by the Brothers Ricci, Is Given Two New York Revivals Within a Month. How the Two Performances Compare

"WILL some one please write a melodious, charming new opera for a coloratura soprano?" pleads Henry T. Finck, in "The Evening Post." As a matter of fact

"Richard Strauss attempted it, but, according to reports and to the testimony of our ears when excerpts were given from 'Ariadne' in concert, he was far from successful. Since coloratura sopranos continue to be born, why should not an occasional good light opera composer come into the world also? Under present circumstances, 'Traviata' at the Metropolitan is followed by 'Traviata' at the Lexington, 'Crispino' by 'Crispino.' Let us hope that the Metropolitan management will not decide to give 'Dinorah,' and that neither house will remember 'La Sonnambula.'"

And yet the prevailing opinion among the critics here seems to be that this "musical comedy in the classical Italian style" has a lot of charm about it still. H. E. Krehbiel, in The Tribune, admits that 'way back in 1884 he felt that "it was the conserving influence of Mme. Patti's art which galvanized what we then thought already a moribund opera into life." But here we are in 1919 enjoying two vigorous revivals of "Crispino e la Comare," and although the echoes of old triumphs have been "growing fainter each year" they are still emphatically audible.

Mr. Krehbiel, along with others, found the story still "delightfully humorous," the music "charming—sensuously, ingratiatingly, insinuatingly charming." He even adds that it "spikes the heavy ordnance of criticism." While to Mr. Huneker, writing in "The Times," it proved "as full of fun as an egg is of meat," also "crammed with coloratura."

As to the relative values of the two presentations, Reginald de Koven declared in "The Herald":

"Let it be said at once and beyond all cavil or question that scenically there could be no comparison, for the Metropolitan's production was one of really unusual pictorial beauty, while that of the Chicago company, while sufficiently adequate not to be tawdry or perfunctory, was by no means sumptuous or insisted on. But putting this question aside, there were so many features of exceeding merit and attractive artistic interest in both performances that the definite award of the palm to either might be fraught with some difficulty to the unprejudiced and conscientious critic.

"Of course, it goes almost without saying that under Campanini's able and experienced baton the music went with a spirit and verve, the lightness, brightness and vivacity of real comic opera, which was not compassed by the Metropolitan performance. The music certainly gained notably in effect in the smaller locale of the Lexington Theatre; another argument, were any needed, for an Opéra Comique in New York, where light opera of this kind could be heard under proper conditions. . . .

"As to rival prima donnas, if Hempel, as Annetta, was, perhaps, more gayly soubrettish, Galli-Curci in action was, perhaps, more archly coquettish. She certainly looked charming, played with winsome grace and sang with all the lightsome gladness, ease and liquid sweetness of a bird, and seemed in exceptionally good voice, as her intonation was even, clean and clear.

"Trevisan, as Crispino, sang well and acted with much animation and real spirit of comedy, and had it not been for Scotti's truly remarkable impersonation—but here the comparisons rest, for he was excellent."

Altogether, Mr. de Koven thought, it was "a well balanced performance" at the Lexington, "which, like that of the Metropolitan, had its high lights and its low ones."

"The Sun" said of Miss Hempel that "she sang and acted Annetta charmingly. The comedy was light, discreet and contagious. Her singing was fluent, luminous and elegant."

And of Galli-Curci "The Brooklyn Eagle" said:

"While the rôle is not her happiest—she is scarcely arch or vivacious enough to realize its full comic possibilities—she was in excellent voice and sang the florid music delightfully and to the evident delight of the large audience. Indeed, Galli-Curci was in such voice as made her name a byword for all that is beautiful in song."

"The World" found this artist singing "with grace and with art, in tone that was often beautiful in timbre." Mr. Huneker felt that, "a sweet singer, always," she sang this rôle "effectively, not brilliantly." To "The Evening Sun" it seemed that "interest centred less upon her interpretation than upon the sheer loveliness of her singing itself." Sylvester Rawling called upon the "Italian group" present, stating that to these devotees

"Galli-Curci's conception of Annetta was better than Frieda Hempel's, because she maintained all its artificiality, never approaching to anything humanely womanly. Frieda Hempel was present and I talked with her, but she neither volunteered nor was I rude enough to ask what she thought."

"Miss Hempel," declared Mr. Krehbiel, "was a spritely and piquant Annetta," from whose lips the music, "rippled entrancingly."

As for Messrs. Scotti and Trevisan, the Crispinos at the Metropolitan and Lexington, respectively, they seem to have come off with honors somewhat equal. Thus, the former's work was pronounced by "The World" to be "pre-eminent artistry"—"a fine mixture of characterization and serious depicting of the cobbler, who had to be chastened before being able to appreciate prosperity at its full value." And of the latter, Pitts Sanborn writes in "The Globe":

"Vittorio Trevisan makes a very different Crispino from Mr. Scotti. Without Mr. Scotti's enormous artistic distinction and authority, he is versed in the real tradition of the buffo. His cobbler is the man of the people, by instinct humorous—a very droll and effective impersonation."

Galli-Curci as Annetta in "Crispino e la Comare"

"The Book of Job"

© George Westermann

—From *Asia*

NEXT week "The Book of Job" will be revived by Stuart Walker in his Portmanteau Theatre, housed at the Punch and Judy. Last year it enjoyed considerable pre-Lenten success. This drama is not merely based upon the famous Biblical book. It is our familiar old King James version quite intact. When The Review asked Mr. Walker's press agent if she would supply a copy of the prompt book for purposes of record here, she replied, in her inimitable way: "Bless you, child, it's just your own Bible, word for word." Nothing was left to the stage manager but to scribble down the names of the speakers in the margin and indicate entrances and exits. This is being faithful to an original with a true vengeance!

The vigorous old lament is just as vigorous to-day as it ever was. Bless you, child, open your Bible and read it again. Here are a few of the eloquent passages:

"IS THERE not an appointed time to man upon earth? are not his days also like the days of a hireling?

"As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as a hireling looketh for the reward of his work.

"So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me.

"When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day.

"My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope.

"O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall see no more good.

"The eye of him that hath seen me shall see me no more: thine eyes are upon me, and I am not.

"As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away; so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more.

"Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.

"Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me?

"When I say, My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint;

"Then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions:

"So that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life.

"I loathe it; I would not live always: let me alone; for my days are vanity.

"What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?

"And that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?

* * *

"MY SOUL is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.

"I will say unto God: Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.

"Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands, and shine upon the counsel of the wicked?

"Hast thou eyes of flesh? or seest thou as man seeth?

"Are thy days as the days of man? are thy years as man's days,

"That thou inquirest after mine iniquity, and searchest after my sin?

"Thou knowest that I am not wicked; and there is none that can deliver out of thine hand.

"Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me.

"Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again?

"Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese?

"Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews.

"Thou hast granted me life and favor, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit.

"And these things hast thou hid in thine heart: I know that this is with thee.

"If I sin, then thou markest me, and thou wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity.

"If I be wicked, woe unto me; and if I be righteous, yet will I not lift up my head. I am full of confusion; therefore see thou mine affliction;

"For it increaseth. Thou huntest me as a fierce lion: and again thou shewest thyself marvellous upon me.

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"I KNOW that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.

"Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

"Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.

"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee:

"Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Fresh Tribute to "Pelleas et Melisande"

"The music of Debussy is proper to us in our day as in no other. For it moved in us before its birth, and afterward returned upon us like a release."

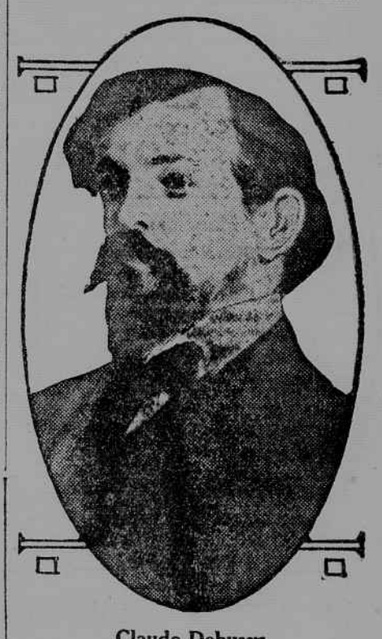
IT IS a singularly eloquent piece of writing which Paul Rosenfeld has contributed to "The Dial" for February 8. His theme is the music of Debussy, and primarily with the music of Debussy's masterpiece, "Pelléas et Mélisande." We read:

Debussy's music is our own. All forms lie dormant in the soul, and there is no work of art actually foreign to us, nor can such a one appear, in all the future ages of the world. But the music of Debussy is proper to us in our day as is no other. For it moved in us before its birth, and afterward returned upon us like a release. Even at a first encounter the style of Pelléas was mysteriously familiar. All its novelty was but the sudden consciousness that we had always needed, say, such a rhythm, such a luminous chord, perhaps had even heard them faintly sounding in our imaginations. The music seemed old as our separate existences. It seemed an exquisite recognition of certain intense and troubling and appeasing moments. It seemed fashioned out of certain ineluctable moments that had budded out of our lives, ineffably sad and sweet, and had made us new, and set us apart. And, at the music's breath, at a half-whispered note, at the unclosing of a rhythm, the flowering of a cluster of tones out of the warm still darkness, they were arisen again in the fulness of their stature, and were become ours entirely.

For the music of Debussy is proper to an impressionistically feeling age. Structurally it is a fabric of exquisite and poignant moments, each one of them full and complete in itself. The phrases contribute to the whole, compose a richly, clearly organized mass, and yet are independent and significant in themselves. No chord, no phrase is subordinate. Each one exists for the sake of its own beauty, occupies the universe for an instant, then merges and disappears. The harmonies are not, as in other music, preparations. They are apparently an end in themselves, flow in space and then change as a shimmering stuff changes hue. For all its golden earthiness, the style of Debussy is the most liquid and impalpable of musical styles. It is forever gliding, gleaming, melting, crystallizing for an instant in some savory phrase, then moving quiveringly onward. It is wellnigh edgeless. It seems to flow through our perceptions as water flows through fingers, and the iridescent bubbles that float upon it burst if we but touch them. It is forever suggesting water—fountains and pools and glistening sprays and the heaving bosom of the sea—or the formless breath of the breeze and storms and perfumes, or the play of sunshine and moonlight.

AND yet, the music of Debussy is classically precise and firm and knit. There is neither uncertainty nor mistiness in his form. His lyrical, shimmering structures are logically irrefragable. The line never hesitates, never becomes involved nor lost. It proceeds directly, clearly, and passing through jewels and colors fuses them into a single mass. The music plots its curve sheerly, is always full of its own weight and timbre. It can be said, quite without exaggeration, that his best work omits nothing, neglects nothing, and that every component element has been justly treated. His little pieces occupy a space as completely as the most massive and impassioned of compositions. It is just because of their formal purity that they succeeded in imparting the sensations intended in them. In the hands of others, in the hands of so many of Debussy's imitators, his style becomes confused and soft and unsubstantial. For the fluidity and the restlessness dominate them, whereas in Debussy these qualities are controlled by an indomitable love of clarity and concentration. For he is of the race of Molière and Pascal and Verlaine. He is of the classical French traditions in his intolerance of all that is vague and murky and pointless, in his instinctive preference for what is aristocratically temperate and firm and reasonable. Despite the modern complexity of his spirit, his latter-day subtlety and delicacy and weariness, his mundane grace and finesse, he is neither spiritually soft nor uncertain. From the very commencement of his career he was nicely conscious of himself. Few musicians have been more sensible of their gift, better aware of its quality and limitations. He had a sureness of taste, a sense of fitness and values, that was rare and singular. It is just the superposition upon a subtle and sensuous nature of so classical a tendency that gives his music its character. For he could fix precisely the most elusive emotions, emotions that flow on the borders of consciousness, vaguely, and that most of us cannot grasp for very dizziness. For him the shadowy places of the soul were full of light.

There are moments when this work, the fine fluid line of sound, the phrases that merge and pass and vanish into one another, become the gleaming rims that circumscribe vast darkling forms. For not infrequently Debussy captured what is distinguished in the age's delight and tragedy. All its fine sensuality, its Eastern pleasure in the infinite daintiness and warmth of nature, all its sudden joyous discovery of color and touch that made men feel as though neither had been known before, are



Claude Debussy

contained in this music. Debussy's art, too, is full of images of the "earth of the liquid and slumbering trees," the "earth of departed sunset," the "earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue." It is full of material loveliness, plies itself to its innumerable forms—to the somnolence of the Southern night, to the hieractic gestures of temple dancers, to the fall of lamplight into the dark, the fantastic gush of fireworks, the romance of old mirrors and faded brocades and Saxony clocks, to the green young panoply of spring. And, just as it gives again the age's consciousness of the delicious shell of earth, so, too, it gives its sense of weariness and oppression and powerlessness. The century had been loud with blare and rumors and the vibration of movement and man had apparently traversed vast distances and explored titanic heights and abysmal depths. And yet, for all the glare, the earth was dark, darker, perhaps, because of the miasmic light, and the life of man seemed as ever a brief and sad and simple thing, the stretching of impotent hands, unable to grasp and hold; the interlacing of shadows; the unclosing, a moment before nightfall, of exquisite and fragile blossoms.

A COMPLEX of determinants made of "Pelléas et Mélisande" the most eloquent of all Debussy's works, and his eternal sign. Issuing as he did from the classical French tradition, abhorring overemphasis and speciousness and exaggeration, want of taste and lucidity, it was ordained that Debussy should turn upon the excesses of the Wagnerian music-drama and, fortified by the knowledge of Rameau's works, oppose his proper standards. His own deep sense of the French term and the possibility of its treatment in dramatic recitative almost compelled his revolt to assume the form of an opera. Maeterlinck's little play afforded him his opportunity, offered itself as a unique auxiliary. In itself it is by no means an insignificant piece of expression. It has the proportions, the accent, of the time. It, too, is full of a constant and overwhelming sense of the evanescence and flux of things and establishes a thing by fixing its atmosphere. And this "vieille et triste légende de la fôret" is filled with images—the old and sombre castle, inhabited by aging people, lying lost amid melancholy land and sunless forests; the rose that blooms in the shadow underneath Mélisande's casement; Mélisande's hair that falls further than her arms can reach—that called a vital and profound response from Debussy's imagination. But it was the figure of Mélisande herself that ultimately made him pour himself into the play and intensify it into the perfect and poignant thing it is. This shadowy little drama permitted Debussy to give himself in the creation of his ideal image. It is Mélisande that the music reveals from the moment that she rises from along the rocks in the mystery of her golden hair, perhaps from the very moment that the orchestra begins the work. The entire score is but what a man might feel toward a woman, a woman that was his and yet was strange and mysterious and unknown to him. There are moments when it is all that lies between two people, when it is the fulness of their knowledge. It is the perfect sign and symbol of an experience. For this is what we ourselves have lived.

THE DREAMS OF YOUTH AND AGE

By Adrienne Cambry

Translated By William L. McPherson

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Here is a short story with a delicate blending of tenderness and irony. It deftly reverses the romantic equation. "Crabbed age and youth cannot live together," says Shakespeare in "The Passionate Pilgrim." Crabbed youth and age are no more companionable when age remains wistful and mellow.

SEATED on a green bench, at the gable end of the villa, Mme. Leroy and M. Dupuy were deep in conversation.

They were old friends, comrades from childhood, of the sort who like each other very much, but never fall in love. As young people they danced and laughed together. But the idea of a marriage between them had never occurred to either. Each had sought and found a mate elsewhere.

Now they live as neighbors, greatly to the satisfaction of each, for they have a rich stock of memories in common.

"Don't you remember, my dear friend?" M. Dupuy began. It was an old story of thirty years ago, at least, which they lived over.

However, they were not absorbed in the past alone, as so many old people are. The future, which youth believes to be its exclusive property, but which doesn't always belong to it, occupied them at this moment in a charming fashion. If they had not loved each other in bygone days, Mme. Leroy and M. Dupuy were realizing a dream which was very dear to them. They were going to unite their children in marriage. The engagement had just been celebrated, and they and all their friends rejoiced at it.

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Not far away from them the two young lovers came and went, side by side, through the tortuous bushy walks, which gave the garden something of the seclusion and mystery of a park.

"Let them talk together alone," said M. Dupuy in an indulgent tone. "Didn't some one say somewhere that the most beautiful days of marriage are the days that precede it?"

He laughed. But Mme. Leroy protested. After forty years of married life she still believed in happiness.

"It is true," answered M. Dupuy. "But you made a love match."

And since she knew by heart her old friend's life, she replied simply:

"Yes. One ought never to make any other kind. You hadn't the courage. But let us leave the dead in peace."

M. Dupuy had been a widower for several years. But it was not that mournful fact which now drew from him so robust a sigh.

"You know, my dear friend," he began, in a confidential manner, "that I was always a good husband. My wife was perfect. Nevertheless, I often regretted the other—the young girl whom I loved and who loved me when I was twenty-five."

"Henriette! Yes, I know."

Mme. Leroy saw pass in her memory the vision of a delicate blonde. M. Dupuy continued:

"Henriette! Yes. She had no fortune. Neither had I. And I had to think of establishing myself. I loved her and she was equally fond of me. When I told my parents they answered me with a single word, 'Never.' In my time, and in families like mine, parents' wishes were sacred. I tried to persuade my parents, but I didn't succeed. Then I yielded, and never saw Henriette again. I was in tears for a week. I was in despair for six months. At the end of a year I married the girl whom they selected for me. I didn't love her. She wasn't pretty, but she was rich. She made a model companion. She gave me two children, whom I adore. Thanks to her fortune I was able to succeed in my career. Nevertheless, it always seemed to me that there was something lacking."

"It was love," said Mme. Leroy, who had kept fresh in her heart the fragrance of an ideal.

Her old friend looked at her and murmured:

"Perhaps! Yes, undoubtedly! But who knows whether I should have been happier?"

"Love passes," said the good lady, gently. "But the hearts which it has visited never grow altogether cold. I pity elderly married people who cannot warm their old age with the memories of the past."

"I did lack the courage," M. Dupuy admitted. "Poor men who marry poor girls must have stout hearts."

Both were silent for a minute, lost in their recollections.

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They caught sight of the young lovers some steps away.

"At least," M. Dupuy resumed, "my daughter will have that happiness. She and your son adore each other, and their happiness cannot be spoiled because neither has married the other for money."

Mme. Leroy acquiesced with a smile. Her eyes, lighted up with a maternal pride and affection, followed the slender silhouette of her son, who was talking eagerly with his fiancée.

"That big boy!" she exclaimed, in a burst of tenderness. "What beautiful things he must be telling her! He is so good! And so poetical! Money counts for nothing with him."

They, too—the young folks—had now seated themselves on a green bench at the turn of a path. He was saying in a low tone:

"We must persuade your father to give us the two hundred thousand francs at once. He has put them in inactive securities, which produce a ridiculous interest. I will make them worth something. Money isn't meant to sleep. It ought to work."

"Certainly," answered the girl in her soft voice. "Papa thinks that we can live as he does. That isn't possible for us. It would be a bore."

"It would be misery," echoed the young man, with emphasis.

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And the old people, their white heads bowed, felt themselves rejuvenated by the thought that at that moment Love was passing close by.